



JOSEPHINUM

Diaconal Review

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BOOK REVIEW

Remain in Me: Holy Orders, Prayer, and Ministry

By James Keating

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Review by Father Carter Griffin

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In a visit to Poland on May 25, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the clergy in Warsaw Cathedral.

“The faithful,” he told them, “expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life.” Though most priests and deacons would agree with the Pope Emeritus, many struggle to put his words into practice. Deacon James Keating’s latest book, *Remain in Me: Holy Orders, Prayer, and Ministry*, will help many to do so.

This concise book covers a lot of ground. In five pithy chapters, Deacon Keating writes about the renewal of our “clerical imagination” from which “flows our thoughts, prayers, and ministries” (7). Such an interior renewal can be a disorienting and painful process, as he notes; but with steady prayer and the gift of spiritual direction, entered into courageously and perseveringly, we are enabled to find the presence of the Lord in our lives and in our ministry. As Keating writes, “Satan hates clerics who pray, because it is prayer that prevents clergy from believing that the *routine* of ministry is exhaustive of life’s meaning. If we lose our prayer lives, we lose a key perspective on life’s expansive meaning” (12).

An internal struggle accompanies genuine prayer; Deacon Keating cautions us to expect it. At times, it will come in the form of temptation due to personal weaknesses, challenges in the ministry, or simply taking

our eyes off Jesus. The answer is not escape but fidelity—as he urges, to “go *into the pain*, not the prayer. In other words, sit where we normally would go to pray and ‘be’ . . . We are to expect nothing from this exercise except the subtle consolation of being a cleric who is faithful to ‘his appointed rounds’” (27). Interior silence and vulnerability, hard won, can be the beginning of true contemplative prayer. Such prayer, though born in silence, will begin to imbue the cleric’s entire life and ministry and keep him in continual communion with Jesus throughout his day.

The book is written specifically for priests and deacons, and Keating endeavors to show that our prayer should be molded to our vocation. We always pray *as* clerics. Indeed, our prayer is part of our “work” as clerics, not something that withdraws us from pastoral duties. “I don’t ‘have time to pray’ is a common clerical *crie de coeur*. The cry comes from our deepest desire to be with God, but the cry can only be answered if we no longer perceive God as a thief, a ‘taker’ of time and calendar. Being with him in prayer, we realize that he is only giving; he is not a threat, but instead bears a promise” (48).

This view of prayer, seeing it in competition with our pastoral work, is a common mistake. It comes from reducing our identity to our ministry. Instead, Deacon Keating insists, our identity emerges from our relationship with the Holy Trinity—as beloved sons of the Father—and only then is it capable of sustaining our mission to the world. “Much pain,” he writes, arises “when clergy enlist ministry to bear the weight of their identity” (55). When we burden our ministry with our affective needs and cravings for achievement, “all ministerial ‘success’ will eventually hang on our walls as hollow trophies, unable to console. Throughout our ministries, we will always find our way to inner peace if we choose to stay in *relationship* with the Holy Trinity as the first responsibility of ministry” (56).

Fixing our eyes on union with Christ will transform our ministry. The prayer of the cleric, interior and contemplative, is ordered to his outward ministry, revealing the love of God and bringing others into communion with the Blessed Trinity. Through the Sacraments, works of mercy, and preaching the Word of God, we become agents of freedom, liberating others from the false consolation of idols, the seduction of sin, and the grip of confusion and doubt. It is the cleric, himself freed by Christ, who is empowered to liberate others. “If we are to minister freedom for others, we need to remain free ourselves through the way of trusting God . . . It is the Lord’s power that frees persons from enslavement to idols; we need only allow him to purify us and configure us to himself” (69-70).

In the last chapter, Deacon Keating briefly but trenchantly explores the relationship between the celibate priest and the married deacon. The gift of celibacy draws a man into greater intimacy with Christ. There is an “ache” in the sacrifice of celibacy that “is not simply the absence of ‘the woman’; it is the pain of humankind separated from his rightful place

as freely receiving and giving love to God without the obstruction of sin. The ache is not just for marriage; celibacy reveals the ache as abiding even deeper in the human core.” The married deacon, on the other hand, is called into a depth of relationship with his wife that acknowledges both the beauty of marriage as well as the “ache” within Christian marriage itself for lasting and perfect union with God. Both celibate priest and married deacon, when united in prayer, experience a profound invitation to a deeper union with Jesus. “In the end,” Keating writes, “holy orders is haunted by the spousal love of Christ” (79).

Deacon Keating’s writing has a wide amplitude. He speaks in no monotone. At times, his writing rises to theological heights. At other times, it plunges deeply into spiritual mysteries. Sometimes, he simply grapples with the grittiness of ordinary ministerial life today. The effect can induce a bit of vertigo. But that slight disorientation, in itself, is instructive. Many of us tend to compartmentalize theology, prayer, and ministry. Deacon Keating’s book aims to gently dismantle those neat silos.

Fidelity to our interior lives takes perseverance, generosity, and trust in the Lord. Our people, perhaps today more than ever, need priests and deacons who are “experts in the spiritual life.” It might mean that we have to say “no” to a few more good things so that we can say a resounding “yes” to the Lord’s invitation to be in deeper union with Him. It is that invitation, and that relationship, that will be our lasting joy—and that of the people we serve.